

Book Description

The coronavirus has caused many areas to enter a state of quarantine, which has led many of us to drastically alter our daily routines in an effort to stay safe and healthy. What should you do to minimize your risk of infection? Check out the top tips from medical professionals and pandemic experts for staying safe in this trying time.

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Staying Safe from Coronavirus: Steps You and Your Family Should

Kirby, Jake

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Staying Safe from Coronavirus

Steps You and Your Family Should Take

from Top Public Health Professionals

Jake Kirby

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Introduction

Recommendations for how to stay safe from the coronavirus, also known as COVID-19, are everywhere. However, it can still be difficult to know the best actions to take. Some sources of information don't provide clear and actionable advice, instead relying on vague concepts like "social distancing" and "flattening the curve" without explaining exactly what these words mean in the current situation. This can leave you uncertain as to whether you are following regulations correctly. Others provide faulty advice, misleading you and resulting in confusion that can put you at risk.

The best way to ensure you are taking the right steps to keep yourself and your family safe is to listen to the experts. This eliminates any possible risk of misinformation and ensures all of your knowledge is up to date and as correct as it can be, which keeps you safer.

Here are the most important pieces of advice that experts agree are critical to keeping yourself healthy during the coronavirus pandemic and lessening the threat of the virus for everyone.



Stay at Home

The absolute best thing you can do for your health right now is to stay at home as often as possible. Stop visiting friends and family, limit your trips to the store or make use of delivery services, and don't put yourself at unnecessary risk unless you have to. Strive to keep your trips out of the house limited to essential supply and grocery runs, and the occasional walk for some fresh air. If you do take a walk, avoid potentially crowded parks and walking trails, and keep your distance from other walkers.

Why is it so important to stay at home? Organizations like the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) want you to stay home because "COVID-19 is thought to spread mainly through close contact from person-to-person in respiratory droplets from someone who is infected" (CDC, 2020, para. 1). The logic here is straightforward; if you stay away from people who could potentially be carriers of the disease, the coronavirus will not be able to spread to you. Remember that the virus can be spread even by people 2



who do not show symptoms, so don't break this guideline just because a friend or family member doesn't appear sick.

Many state governments have enacted stay-at-home orders, which vary by location. Check your local news for information about your specific state's current policies, but it is always better to err on the side of caution and stay inside even if your state does not have an enforced quarantine policy.

If you feel yourself growing a little stir-crazy, look for activities and hobbies you can practice at home. Catch up on missed TV shows, get some reading done, work on a puzzle, learn a new skill, or just spend some quality time with your family. It can be tough, but if you find a way to occupy your time you will have a much easier experience.

Of course, it is not possible for many people to stay at home. Those who are considered essential workers and who are still being called in to work must venture out of their houses on a regular basis, and even those who are not essential workers must still leave occasionally to pick up necessary purchases. Luckily, there are still many things you 3



can do to decrease your risk of catching the coronavirus when you need to leave the house, though staying home is the most foolproof method.

Use Cloth Masks When Entering a Public Place

If you need to go somewhere public, like to a store or to pick up food, wear a mask.

Initially, masks were not recommended for general public use, but as the coronavirus'

spread has grown, experts have changed their recommendation. Now, it is suggested that you wear a mask both for your own safety and the safety of others.

The CDC recommends the use of face masks in public places where it is otherwise difficult to keep your distance from others. Their proper use can reduce the chances of getting sick because they form a barrier between yourself and potentially infected respiratory droplets that might otherwise come in contact with your nose or mouth.

Additionally, face masks keep asymptomatic carriers of the virus from transferring it to 4

the people they come in contact with. Helping to slow the spread of the virus in your community increases the percentage of healthy people and decreases your risk of contracting the virus, so it is

important that people adhere to safety regulations like wearing masks.

Still, it is important to remember that wearing a mask does not make you completely immune to getting sick. It can keep some germs at bay and discourage you from touching your face, but simply putting on a mask does not mean you cannot still get the coronavirus through other methods of contamination. Ensure that you follow all other safety guidelines when wearing a mask in public for maximum efficacy.

Cloth Masks Vs. Medical Grade Masks

The current guidelines only suggest using cloth masks. Medical grade masks, such as N95 respirators, are not necessary for general public use. Instead, they should be reserved for people who know they will be coming into extended contact with infected patients, such as doctors, nurses, and caregivers. Typically, most people will not need any more protection than what a standard cloth mask provides, and wasting N95 masks on a trip where you might not need one at all takes them away from where they are most needed. Also, many medical grade masks have special procedures for putting them on and removing them to prevent accidental contamination, which requires training that only medical professionals have. Without this training, the masks are not much more useful than standard cloth ones, so you are better off using cloth masks.



One added benefit of cloth masks is that, unlike many commercially sold masks, they are always available because you can make them from items in your own house.

Instructions are available online from the CDC website for making your own mask using simple household objects like fabric from repurposed clothing, a sewing needle, and elastic bands. The ability to DIY a cloth mask makes them much more accessible and ensures you can avoid potential price gouging or taking away masks that might otherwise go to hospitals.

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Maintain Your Distance from Others

You have likely heard the term “social distancing” in frequent use recently. The idea behind it is to limit your contact with others, thereby distancing yourself socially.

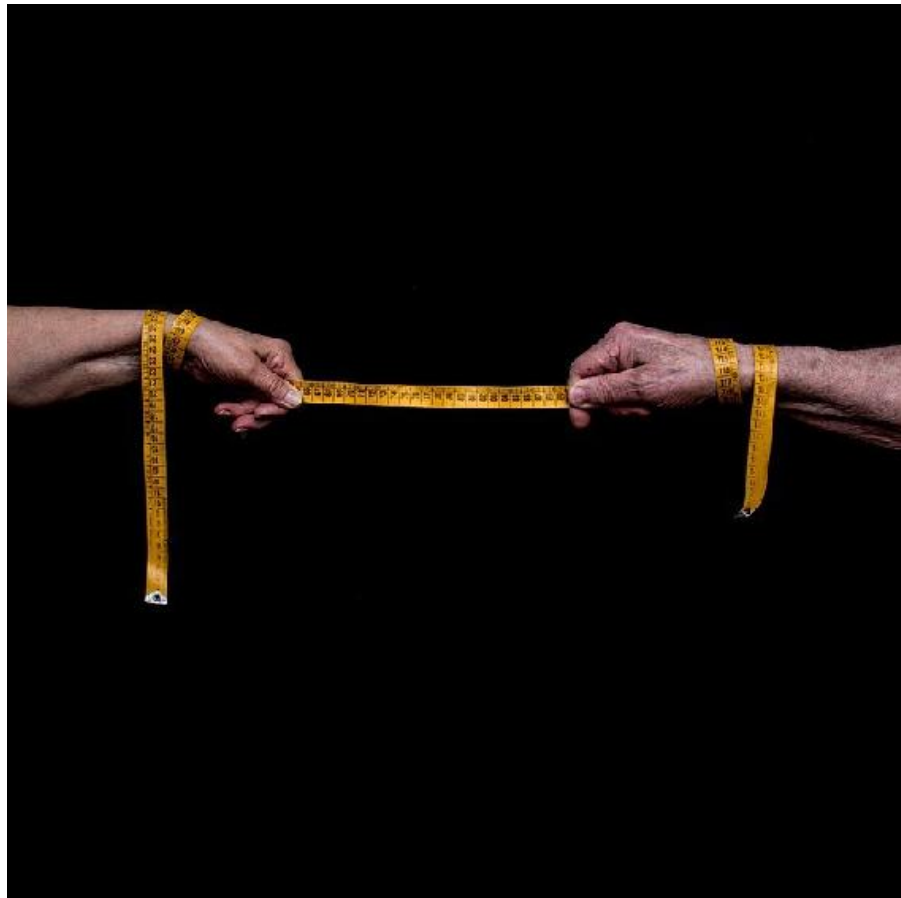
This means staying home as often as possible, avoiding contact with people outside of your household, and keeping your distance from others when in a public location.

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Person-to-person spread of coronavirus typically requires you to either touch an infected surface or be in close proximity with an infected person. We will discuss the former situation shortly, but for the latter, the best way to avoid this possibility is to put space between yourself and others.

Keeping your distance does not mean you must be halfway across the room from anyone else. It just means you should keep others out of your personal space. If you are standing in line at the store, take a few steps back from the person in front of you. If you are in a drive thru, try to minimize contact when getting your food. Small steps like these, which are only a small inconvenience for you, can make all the difference.



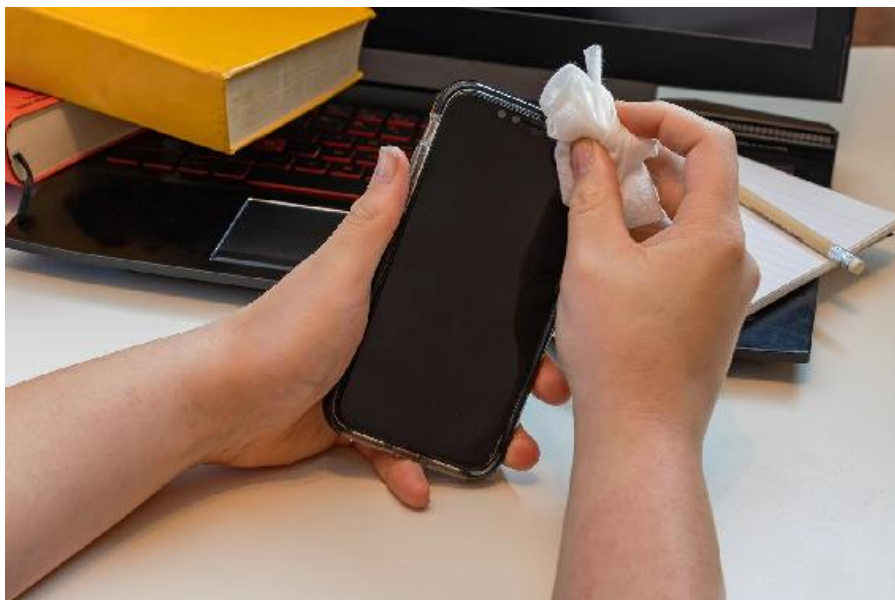
The current recommendation for how far you should be from other people is six feet. This is about as long as your total arm span, give or take a foot. Keeping this distance helps to ensure that the majority of respiratory droplets are not able to reach you. You will be less likely to breathe in these droplets, which could contain the virus. Six feet is a distance from which you can speak to those around you comfortably, without putting either of you at risk.



Once again, staying six feet apart does not guarantee that you have no risk of catching the virus from someone else. While it keeps the largest respiratory droplets at bay, there is still a chance that some could travel farther. You cannot meet up with friends and family outside your household safely, even if you all agree to keep your chairs six feet apart from each other at the table. Still, keeping physical distance between yourself and strangers eliminates a great deal of the risks you might otherwise face going out into public. It is not a foolproof method, and staying away from public spaces is always the preferred method of social distancing, but it does provide you with some safety.

Clean and Disinfect Surfaces

As previously mentioned, there is a possibility of picking up the coronavirus from infected surfaces. This occurs when someone with the virus coughs or sneezes into their hand, rubs their eye, or otherwise transfers the virus to their hands and then touches something like a subway pole or a grocery pushcart. This can also happen if someone not currently infected touches an infected surface and spreads the virus to other surfaces.



According to experts at the World Health Organization (WHO), the coronavirus can live outside of our bodies for a limited time. While the exact length of time COVID-19

can survive on a surface is uncertain, “coronaviruses (including preliminary information on the COVID-19 virus) may persist on surfaces for a few hours or up to several days”

(WHO, 2020, para. 19). This timeframe may be subject to certain variables such as temperature, weather, and the material of the surface the virus is on. Until we are certain how long the coronavirus can survive outside the body, it is best to take care to disinfect surfaces that might potentially become infected.

To sterilize surfaces, you can use a standard disinfectant. For anything that can be washed in the sink, soap and water works well. Putting potentially infected clothes and cloth masks in the laundry machine works as well. For anything that is too large to be washed by either of these methods, or which is made out of a material that cannot get washed, disinfecting wipes are fine. If you choose to use an alcohol-based disinfectant like hand sanitizer to wipe something down, make sure that you use a disinfectant that is at least 60% alcohol, or it will be minimally effective against the virus.



You should consider washing or wiping down anything new that comes into your house. This includes groceries and store-bought supplies that may have been touched by other employees and patrons in the store, as well as packages received through the mail.

Ideally, your house should be a safe environment that is free from the virus, so you want to take all of the possible steps to keep everything inside of it clean.

You may also wish to clean off frequently used surfaces in your house as well, especially if many people touch them. A shared computer, for example, should be disinfected occasionally to prevent possible spread of germs between members of the house. Other items to clean off regularly include remote controls, game pieces, kitchen appliances, and doorknobs.

Wash Your Hands Thoroughly



Experts have repeatedly stressed the need for proper personal hygiene, primarily in the form of hand washing. When you wash your hands, you kill any viruses you may have picked up before they have a chance to get into your system. If you leave the house, hand washing should be the first thing you do when you walk in the door to ensure you do not carry anything in from outside.

While you are likely already washing your hands, you may not be taking as much care as you now need to. Thorough hand washing means spending at least 20 seconds at the sink, not simply rinsing your hands off and assuming you are good to go. The most commonly cited frame of reference for the length of 20 seconds is singing “Happy Birthday” twice, but there are a number of other songs you can measure the time by if

“Happy Birthday” doesn’t sound like something you want to sing in your head multiple times a day.

Additionally, you should be using soap every time you wash your hands. Soap helps to break down the protective envelope that surrounds the coronavirus, which in turn destroys it. Using water alone is not enough to get your hands clean.



When you scrub your hands, be sure to reach all surfaces. This means the frequently neglected areas like the backs of your hands, the spaces between your fingers, and your fingertips. Make sure you lather soap on each of these areas. When you are finished and ready to dry your hands, use a disposable paper towel rather than a hand towel when possible to decrease the risk of any remaining germs contaminating the towel.

Alternatives to Hand Washing

While washing your hands is the most reliable method for ridding yourself of any coronavirus that may be on your fingers, sometimes a sink is not available. In this case, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that is a minimum of 60% alcohol. It is good practice to keep a small bottle of sanitizer with you when you leave the house, especially if you know you may come into contact with an infected surface. If you take the train, bus, or subway to get to work, or if you must exchange money or a card with someone for payment, you should disinfect your hands immediately after. Even if you use hand 14



sanitizer, you should take care not to touch your face until you can really wash your hands to ensure that there is no chance the virus still remains on your skin.

Avoid Contact With Anyone Displaying Symptoms

Minimizing your contact with the infected is critical in reducing the spread of the coronavirus. This may not be possible for people who work in healthcare or who are designated caregivers, but all others should avoid spending time with anyone outside of your immediate family, especially if that person is not feeling well. Being around someone who has a chance of infecting you needlessly puts your own health at risk. Even if you don't believe the illness to be a product of coronavirus, it is better to be safe than sorry.

Treat all flu-like symptoms as if they were contagious and keep your distance as much as possible.



In order to know what you should be looking out for, you need to know exactly what “flu-like symptoms” entail. The most commonly identified symptoms of coronavirus are a fever that persists for multiple days and shortness of breath. Other symptoms include a sore throat, runny nose, coughing, and irregular tiredness. Some more mild versions of these symptoms may not require a visit to the doctor, or the infected person may be unable to acquire a test in their area, but they should be treated as possible coronavirus cases all the same. Again, it is better to be overly cautious than to put your health in jeopardy.



When a loved one is sick, your initial reaction may be to visit them to provide care.

You may also cohabitate with someone who falls ill, especially if they continue to work outside the house. While it is a nice sentiment to want to look out for those you care about, you do not want to do so at the risk of your own well-being. It helps no one if you both fall ill. However, there are many ways you can care for an ill loved one without increasing your risk of catching the virus. If you do not live with them, you can make daily calls to see how they are feeling and ensure that they are getting medical treatment if their condition worsens. If you live with someone who is sick, you can speak with them from a safe distance and make sure they are getting enough food and plenty of fluids. You can keep an eye on their condition from afar as well. Try to avoid touching surfaces they have touched, and wash your hands shortly after. While it can be hard not to spend time in close contact with a sick loved one, you are better off making sure you stay healthy so there is someone to take care of them.



It is also good practice to avoid people who seem to be ill in public places. If you are in a store and you see someone coughing or sneezing, give them some space and try to avoid close contact with them. It is better to be safe than sorry, and very few people will perceive your actions as rude when they are taken to protect your own health. You are already keeping strangers at a minimum distance of six feet, so ensuring your path does not cross with someone else who appears to not be feeling well is just an extension of the behavior you are already practicing.

Ensure You Are Getting Your Information from Accurate Sources

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Having access to straightforward and accurate sources of information is imperative during a pandemic. Staying informed keeps you updated on the state of the world, the progression of the coronavirus in your area, and any local guidelines that have been recently established. If you do not regularly check the news, you could be missing out on potentially life-saving public policy and public health information.

However, the benefits of checking the news are lessened when that news comes from an uncertain source. In February, the WHO classified misinformation on the coronavirus as its own kind of “infodemic,” one which creates “an overabundance of information—some accurate and some not—that makes it hard for people to find trustworthy sources and reliable guidance when they need it” (WHO, 2020, para. 5). With many trying to pull attention to their news source or, in some cases, attempting to cash in on the pandemic and the panic it has caused, misinformation is everywhere, and falling prey to it could cause you to engage in some dangerous activities without realizing the threat they pose to your health. For example, if a website claimed the coronavirus was actually a hoax and no one was really getting sick, you might be inclined to leave the house without practicing safety regulations, putting yourself at risk. Where you get your information from matters and making sure you have a reliable news source goes a long way towards keeping you safe.

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When you are looking for reliable sources, look to virology and

pandemic experts.

Official organizations that are trained to deal with infectious diseases, like the CDC and WHO, consistently provide accurate, current information. Listening to briefings delivered by government officials who work closely with experts and who follow their recommendations when making new policy decisions can also be a good way to learn what to do and what not to do.

Stay away from news sources that are disreputable and that push false claims.

Beware news outlets that engage in either excessive over-exaggeration or under-exaggeration of the issue. Keep a critical eye and fact check anything you find to be suspicious information before acting on it. This is especially true for anyone saying they have a 'cure' for the coronavirus.

Be Skeptical of Miracle Cures

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Unfortunately, there are many people willing to take advantage of those just looking for accurate information and hope in this time of crisis. These people will push products they tout as 'cures,' but more often than not are just placebos that will do little to impact your health. A miracle cure for the virus sounds amazing, but it is just too

good to be true. As of now, there are no cures or vaccines for COVID-19 that have been approved by the CDC or the WHO. Treatment should be performed only by professional doctors and nurses.

While miracle cures may not seem so bad at first, consider that they can lead people to engage in more dangerous behaviors. If someone believes themselves to be immune to the virus, they will stop taking precautions and will most likely end up falling ill. If someone's advice runs counter to what experts are suggesting, you should be very skeptical of the information's truthfulness. Additionally, some so-called cures are actually inherently harmful. The most notable example of this is the rumor that drinking diluted bleach could help your body combat the coronavirus. Of course, ingesting bleach is never good for your body, and anyone who followed this advice would have suffered serious injury. There are many chemicals and substances being touted as coronavirus cures, but 21

until a vaccine is officially made available, it is best to stick to following social distancing practices.

Conclusion

Taking the above steps to limit your exposure to the coronavirus is about more than just keeping yourself safe. Following experts' guidance on how best to combat the virus helps keep everyone in your community safe. Staying home limits the number of people the virus can spread to, directly contributing to shortening its lifespan.

Disinfecting surfaces kills viral particles. Using cloth masks and donating spare respirator masks to hospitals ensures everyone has the tools they need to combat the virus. Though you may not see it at first, you are making a difference to your friends, family, and town.

It is very easy to feel hopeless during the current situation, but the reality is that even taking simple steps like staying inside makes a positive change in the world.

Following these steps helps you keep yourself safe and protect the well-being of those around you. If everyone follows proper procedures and expert advice for social distancing and routine disinfection, we can shorten the time we all have to spend with the threat of the coronavirus looming over us and get back to normal as soon as possible.

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